

MIAMI HERALD
2 September 1986

Around the Americas

Nicaraguan says he spied for CIA

By SAM DILLON
Herald Staff Writer

MANAGUA, Nicaragua — A prominent businessman, haggard, red-eyed and stammering after two weeks of incommunicado detention, described to reporters Monday three years of alleged collaboration with CIA agents.

Guillermo Quant, 54, owner of a large Managua trucking company, vice president of the Nicaraguan Chamber of Commerce and a board member of Managua's American School, spoke at a carefully orchestrated press conference, his first public appearance since his arrest Aug. 19.

Quant said that after initial contacts with officials of the U.S. Embassy here, he had been trained in clandestine communication methods in Miami and Costa Rica and had sent by mail a series of secret messages to foreign addresses given him by the CIA.

Quant said he had passed along information on Nicaragua's petroleum facilities, of which he had knowledge through his business, as well as information he picked up "on the street." He denied that he had revealed military secrets.

Quant's recollection of dates was poor, but Interior Ministry Capt. Oscar Losa claimed Quant had collaborated with the CIA since 1983.

Quant's confession comes at a time of heightened counterintelligence vigilance here, with Sandinista authorities and diplomats predicting an increase in espionage activities directed at Nicaragua as Congress is expected to soon lift a two-year ban on CIA involvement.

Several features of Quant's case, however, seemed especially curious, justifying skepticism about the veracity of his statements. Quant had in recent months loudly criticized the Sandinista government at diplomatic parties and other gatherings in Managua, peculiar behavior for a man allegedly involved in clandestine espionage activity.

Also, the circumstances of his arrest were odd for an accused spy. Quant was first detained Aug. 19, after a quarrel with an agent from Nicaragua's Embassy Protection corps over a parking infraction outside the U.S. embassy. He was then held for nearly four days at a local lockup of the Sandinista police, said his friends and relatives, who were told Quant would serve a sentence of several months for the crime of "lack of respect for a police officer."

The public accusations of Quant's involvement in the CIA first emerged on Sandinista television Aug. 23, five days after his initial detention.

Furthermore, last November, Quant had been detained by officials of Nicaragua's Directorate of State Security in November and held for a day in the El Chipote prison in downtown Managua. That detention came amid a series of brief detentions of businessmen and others known for their peaceful political opposition to the Sandinistas.

Monday, Capt. Losa claimed that authorities had known of Quant's alleged CIA ties at the time of his November detention, but that they had then decided not to hold Quant or charge him with spying. "We considered that it was sufficient to warn him at that time," Losa said Monday.

Now, Losa said, Quant will be tried for espionage.

Quant said he had been held since his arrest at a local police station in a Managua suburb and at State Security's Casa 50, in the El Chipote security complex.

Before Quant was led by green-uniformed police into a conference room at interior Ministry headquarters Monday, Losa showed reporters a German-made bathroom scale he claimed the CIA had given Quant for the concealment of secret code charts, and a Sony shortwave radio Quant allegedly used to receive encoded messages from the CIA.

Quant's wife said in an interview that she had never seen the scale before. Quant said he had hid the scale from his wife in their palm-shaded suburban home.

Quant named three U.S. officials based in Nicaragua as his alleged contacts. An embassy official confirmed two had worked at the embassy. They were: Michael Donovan, chief economic counselor from 1984 to 1986, who left a month ago as part of a normal rotation, and Benjamin Wickham, first secretary from 1983 to 1985.

Quant was indistinct in pronouncing the third American's name, and embassy officials could not confirm whether the person had been posted here.

After Nicaraguan authorities arrested two Interior Ministry officials as CIA agents in February, two of four U.S. officials named as their managers were transferred out of Nicaragua, according to U.S. Embassy spokesman Al Lawn. The other two officials had already left Nicaragua, Lawn said.

Lawn said that, because Quant held a position on the Board of the American School, he "could have dealt with any number of American officials without it having anything to do with spying."